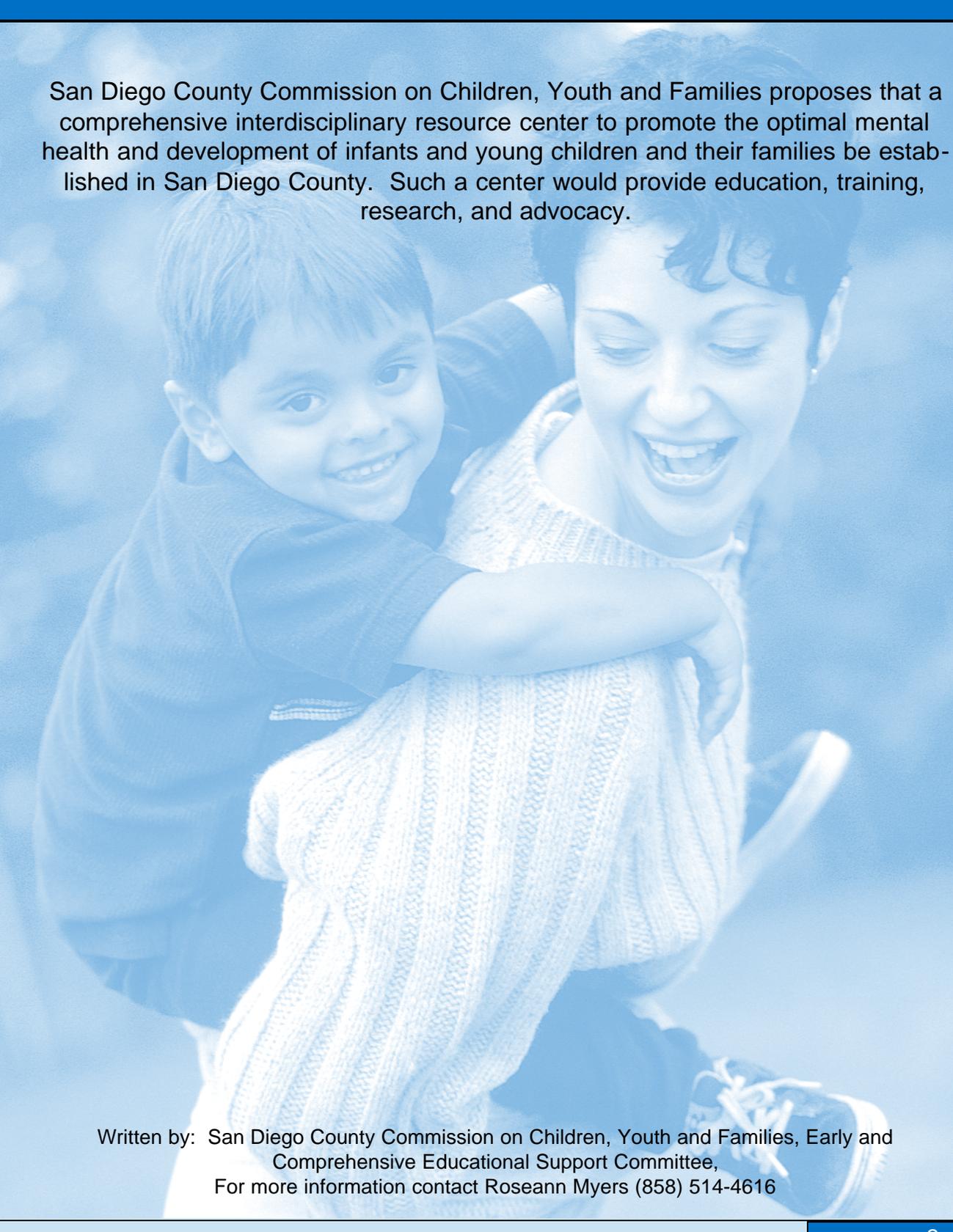


# Young Child Institute: San Diego's Hub for Social Emotional Development and School Readiness



Concept Paper

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San Diego County Commission on Children, Youth and Families proposes that a comprehensive interdisciplinary resource center to promote the optimal mental health and development of infants and young children and their families be established in San Diego County. Such a center would provide education, training, research, and advocacy.

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### **Issue/Problem Statement**

Research has brought major advances in our understanding of the importance of a child's experiences during the first five years of life and forced us to recognize that these are the years during which the foundations are laid for a lifetime of learning, health and the ability to form lasting relationships. Through meetings with professionals and parents this past year the San Diego County Commission on Children, Youth and Families and its partners have identified a critical need in our community for an Institute to provide support for professionals working with infants and young children showing signs of social and emotional disturbance, which when addressed, will promote overall healthy development and school readiness. At this time, San Diego County lacks the needed mental health intervention services for these infants, young children and their families, and also has a shortage of professionals with the skills to treat them.

### **Description of Proposed Resource Center**

This concept paper proposes the development of a center to promote the optimal social and emotional development of infants and young children. (See Attachment) The goal of the Center is to ensure that young children and their families have needed services and supports.

### **Benefits**

- ♦ A San Diego "hub" for research, training and education, leading to the implementation of best practices in local programs and development of new approaches and cost-effective interventions.
- ♦ Central information and referral center on early childhood mental health for parents, caregivers and the community.
- ♦ Development of strategies to ensure timely dissemination of research to parents and practitioners in order to use best practices to promote social and emotional development of infants and young children.
- ♦ Formation of a collaborative network of relationships to meet the comprehensive health and social service needs of families.
- ♦ Spending on prevention and early intervention services translates into decreased costs later in more expensive systems like child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health and special education.

The goal of the Center is to optimize the healthy development of San Diego area children at each age and stage of their growth, while enhancing relationships between children and their parents or caregivers to create healthy and secure attachments. A comprehensive interdisciplinary resource center would weave together a seamless system of services on behalf of parents, caregivers, infants, toddlers and children so that they might be ready to learn when they enter school. It is envisioned that this Institute will provide:

- 1) Education and training in mental health clinical interventions in collaboration with institutions of higher education.
- 2) Education and training for child care professionals and early childhood educators interested in developing the skills to teach and care for behaviorally, socially and emotionally challenging preschool children.
- 3) Consultation for professionals serving infants and young children experiencing issues such as:
  - ♦ Attachment and other relationship disorders
  - ♦ Aggressive, destructive and other behavioral problems leading to failures in adjustment in child care and preschool programs.
  - ♦ Developmental regulatory or multi-system disorders or other special needs.
  - ♦ Exposure to abuse and neglect, and/or exposure to the consequences of out of home placements.
- 4) Infant Toddler Therapeutic Laboratory Preschool to provide intense services for high need children. Also training in mental health intervention and in early childhood preschool education.
- 5) A setting to support research on prenatal, infant, and early childhood mental health and developmental issues. (In collaboration with Child and Adolescent Services Research Center and other institutions of higher education).

*“For many who later are identified as having serious emotional and behavioral disabilities, there are both anecdotal and research-based reports that although parents of these children recognize problems in preschool (or earlier) years, there is a predictable multi-year lag between that recognition and getting the children and families linked to appropriate services, thus losing the potential efficacy of intensive early intervention for these young children.”*

Source: National Center on Child Poverty, [www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org)

### **Background Information**

Young children and their caregivers showing signs of mental health distress need timely and developmentally appropriate intervention. Early intervention will prevent more serious, long-term emotional and behavioral problems, repair problematic relationships, and help young children develop the emotional skills they need to succeed in school. It is well known that success in kindergarten can predict a child's future academic achievement.

Long-lasting adverse effects on the intellectual and emotional development of young children due to disturbed infant-parent interaction and stressful or neglecting environments have been observed for many years. Linkages have also been documented between early neglect, stress, maternal rejection, abuse or mental retardation and adolescent or adult vio-

*“While good early experiences help the brain develop well, poor experiences can literally cause a genetically normal child to become mentally retarded or a temperamentally easy-going child to develop serious emotional difficulties.”*

Source: Zero To Three  
www.zerotothree.org

lence and criminality, or chronic psychiatric disorders. Cutting edge research on brain development has brought structural evidence to support these observations. There is now substantial research data to show that healthy and secure parent-child attachment has a definitive effect on brain growth and development. As brain systems become hardwired over the first two to three years of life, patterns of interpersonal interaction, affective regulation, and conceptual learning styles become established that will influence the individual's psychobiological systems throughout the lifespan.

This research has brought major advances in our understanding of the importance of a child's experiences during the first five years of life. Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D. of the ChildTrauma Academy states, "one set of experiences will produce taxpayers and one set of experiences will produce tax-consumers." It has also made us aware of the urgency of early intervention and the importance of supporting families with young children. Intervention provided early while the child's brain is still "plastic" can help a child get back on track developmentally so he/she can make use of early developmental opportunities. The most effective place to work with these children is in the context of their own family, with those people that play a primary role in providing a stimulating and positive environment.

Kindergarten teachers report that they are most concerned with children who lack the motivational and the social-emotional qualities of school readiness, because it is more difficult to assist children who are not interested in learning, lack confidence in their success, or are incapable of cooperation and self-control. (Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). In the words of one teacher, the problem is that "the kids are sad, mad, and [acting] bad, it's not that they can't add." (The Kaufmann Early Education Exchange: Set for Success, 2002). In the past emphasis for school readiness was on cognitive skills, prevailing wisdom now sees readiness for school incorporating a much broader skill set.

The California Department of Education (2000) outlined the following conditions of well being for preschool children and their families as necessary for those children to reach their full potential:

- ♦ Children are personally and socially competent.
- ♦ Children are effective and interested learners.
- ♦ Children show physical and motor competencies.
- ♦ Children are safe and healthy.
- ♦ Families support their children's learning and development.
- ♦ Families achieve their goals.

## Outcomes Desired

- ♦ Increased numbers of professionals trained to provide clinical services for infants and young children and their families showing signs of attachment, behavioral, social and emotional disturbance.
- ♦ Development of avenues for dissemination of culturally relevant information to parents about positive parenting skills & techniques.
- ♦ Support interdisciplinary training and practice by providing a forum for training and case consultation.
- ♦ Improved quality of parent education through professional training and support for parent educators and other professionals.
- ♦ Consolidation of the assessment process, utilization of a common tool(s) throughout programs in San Diego County.
- ♦ Increased continuity and coordination of mental health services for young children and their families, which leads to cost effectiveness.
- ♦ Provide a platform for research and the dissemination of evidence based practice guidelines to the community.

## Conclusion

This concept paper recommends the establishment of a comprehensive system of mental health services for very young children and their families through the creation of "The Young Child Institute: San Diego's Hub for Social Emotional Development and School Readiness." The Center acts as a "hub" to coordinate and support mental health, social service, early education, and child care professionals providing services to infants and young children and their families. The Institute would provide education, training, research, and the development of public policy to champion optimal social emotional development for infants and young children. The Institute would support community-based providers in areas of the County where they exist and support the development of new services in areas lacking in resources. Young children with social and emotional challenges need our time, attention and willingness to provide family-centered consultation and therapeutic opportunities now, in order to build needed quality relationships and the skills that will enable them to enter school ready to learn. Without these services, their full potential will be lost.

“Government will not solve these problems. All segments of the community have a role and responsibility to work *together* to develop and implement solutions. Government, however, must play a leadership role in these efforts. Government can facilitate, catalyze and, in some cases, provide resources necessary to implement solutions.”

-Bruce Perrv. M.D., Ph.D., Child Trauma Academy

**Local programs demonstrating the need:**

**Developmental Screening and Enhancement Project,** serves young children entering the child welfare system through the provision of (1) developmental assessment, (2) developmental treatment services, and (3) community-based education for caregivers/parents. Of 109 children receiving an initial screen in the past year, over 21% were in the clinically significant range for behavior problems on the Child Behavior Checklist.

**Children's Care Connection,** serves young children and their families in North San Diego County through the provision of (1) developmental assessment, (2) developmental treatments, and (3) community-based parent education. Of 993 children who received an initial screen, nearly 28% were in the clinically significant range for behavior problems on the Child Behavior Checklist.

Source: Child & Adolescent Services Research Center, San Diego, [www.casrc.org](http://www.casrc.org)

**Complementary Efforts**

There are several local, state and national efforts around early childhood social emotional well-being and school readiness which could complement, fund and/or provide other resources and support for a resource center in San Diego.

**SB 1703**

Through YMCA-Childcare Resource Service, San Diego County expects to receive just over \$1 million from the State to increase capacity for the inclusion of children with special needs in childcare centers and in family childcare homes. These funds will be used, in part, to provide a Resource Team of consultants to child care providers in order that they may serve more children with disabilities or behavioral and emotional health issues.

**First 5 Commission of San Diego**

The ultimate goal of the First 5 Commission of San Diego is that every child will enter school physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively ready to learn. This Commission recently proposed its 2003-2006 Strategic Plan, and 2003-2004 Implementation Plan which listed in its priority results and strategies an effort to support a regional behavioral health planning process to formulate a plan for linking and coordinating behavioral health services. This effort will be facilitated through collaboration with other agencies in joint planning and decision-making, pooling of resources, identification of other funding sources and advocacy for policy change.

**Special Needs Project-First 5 Commission of California**

Embedded in the Special Needs Project is an initiative to increase mental health services to children ages 0-5 in the context of their families, and to increase the capacity of counties to deliver these services in a collaborative manner.

Six goals include:

- 1) development of new mental health services,
- 2) development of infrastructure,
- 3) education and training for the professional community,
- 4) training of mental health clinicians to work with young children and their families,
- 5) interagency collaboration, and
- 6) evaluation.

Eight counties are currently participating in the Initiative. The California First 5 Commission recently proposed to spend up to \$15 million on the Special Needs Project.

### ***Early Intervention Saves Money***

Seven to 20% of preschool children have levels of disruptive, aggressive behaviors severe enough to qualify for a mental health diagnosis. Quality preschool programs, for example, have been shown to decrease the likelihood that these children will later engage the criminal justice system. They do so in part by helping children achieve healthy emotional development. A long-term study of the High/Scope Perry Preschool program found that for every \$1 invested, \$7.16 was returned to the public in reduced cost of crime, welfare and remedial education and in added tax revenues when the preschoolers became adult workers.

Source: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids  
[www.fightcrime.org](http://www.fightcrime.org)

### **National Association of Counties (NACo) Presidential Initiative on Early Childhood and School Readiness**

Launched by NACo President Ken Mayfield, this Initiative seeks to educate county officials concerning the importance of early childhood development, provide technical assistance to counties to improve local programs that strengthen children and families, and highlight counties that are successfully addressing the needs of families and young children in their communities. NACo recently provided a list of resources that counties could use to finance early childhood services and supports.

### **Stakeholders**

Children & families, adoptive & foster families, child care providers, mental health & health care providers, local universities & their students, school districts & teachers, family resource centers, com-

munity members, parent groups, policy makers, the private sector & others.

### **Current/Potential Partners**

Child Care and Development Planning Council, Commission for Collaborative Services for Young Children & their Families (CoCoSer), Commission on Children Youth and Families, County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency: Children's Mental Health, CalWORKs Childcare, Office of Public Health and Childrens Services, Exceptional Family Resource Center, First 5 Commission, Heartbeat Family Partnership, Pediatric Life Coaching, San Diego Regional Center for the Developmentally Disabled, YMCA-Childcare Resource Service, foundations and other funding organizations, local hospitals, schools and universities, child care centers & others.

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A Stitch in Time: What Works with Troubled Preschoolers a Research Brief by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2002, [www.fightcrime.org](http://www.fightcrime.org)

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## Additional Resources

Fisher, H., Cohen, C. & Flynn M., Federal Funding for Early Childhood Services: A Guide to Sources and Strategies. The Finance Project. June 2000. [www.financeproject.org](http://www.financeproject.org)

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- ♦ Sherry Hartwell, Earliest Relationships Network
- ♦ Dana Lovelace, Community Care Licensing
- ♦ Rev. Nan Mitchell, Ecumenical Council
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- ♦ Tasha Woods, Neighborhood House Association Head Start
- ♦ Adelaide Zindler, Pediatric Life Coach, [www.pedsplay.com](http://www.pedsplay.com)

# Young Child and Family Resource Center for Social Emotional Well-Being and School Readiness

## Direct Services

- Needs Assessment & Referral
- Intervention
- Outpatient Clinic
- Therapeutic Preschool
- Consultation with Professionals, Parents & Caregivers
- Community library & drop-in center
- Community systems of Care
- Clearing House
- Parent Liaisons, Groups & Advisory Board

## Training & Education

- Parent Groups
- Interdisciplinary Training
- Mental Health Providers
- Special Education
- Child Care and Development Providers
- Law Enforcement
- Educational Institutions
- Social and Health Services Professionals

## Research

- Best Practices Studies
- Outcome Studies
- Methods for dissemination
- Ethnic diversity & child rearing practices
- Childhood Disorders
- Attachment
- Parental Depression
- Social disparities and child outcomes
- Cultural hurdles in service utilization
- Collaboration with other researchers/entities and Parents

## Policy & Funding

- Community & Parents
- Legislative Advocacy
- City
- County
- State
- Federal